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SALT LAKE DISTRICT

Margaret Davis finds there's more to Utah than Winter Olympics and the Osmonds

UTAH can be easily overlooked among the huge range of holiday destinations on offer in a country as vast as the United States.

Mention Salt Lake City to any Brit, and it will conjure up images of Mormons, weak beer and the 2002 Winter Olympics.

In fact, Utah has much more to offer than that, especially for holidaymakers wanting to escape the daily grind and shake off the cobwebs in a spectacular outdoor playground.

The western state is perhaps best known for skiing and winter sports, but remains a quite breathtaking rocky wilderness when there is no snow on the ground.

Its landscape ranges from Alpine-esque mountains to the red rock made famous by the movie *Thelma And Louise* and legendary cowboy actor John Wayne.

The Swiss Mormons who first settled in Midway's Heber Valley, less than an hour's drive from Salt Lake City airport, were drawn to the Wasatch Mountains because they were reminded of their home nation.

Their legacy lives on in a slightly eccentric shape at the Swiss-themed Zermatt resort, where visitors are greeted by a bronze statue of a bear playing an accordion - in tribute to a

man who would don fancy dress every year on Swiss Day.

Meticulous attention has been paid to the interior, with furnishings, carvings and wood sourced from Europe, and it is a very relaxing place to stay.

Even in the absence of snow, the area is a beautiful place to visit. In early October we were treated to the blazing reds and yellows of the autumn leaves - a perfect backdrop for pony trekking in the foothills nearby.

The differences between the rural life here and that in most parts of the UK was brought home by the fact that San Juan County got its first mobile-phone mast in the week I visited. It had caused some genuine anger in the area, but for holidaymakers it makes it a much more attractive destination.

Another great place to embrace the great outdoors is Capitol Reef National Park, which has a variety of hikes. The Sulphur Canyon route, classed as moderate, was mostly easy going but we visited when the river water was "higher than it had been for five years" according to our guide Scott.

This meant a good deal more scrambling over rock ledges and climbing down fairly steep drops than intended, but it was fantastic fun. Just make

sure no-one minds getting their shoes and trousers thoroughly drenched.

Coming back to urban surroundings, Salt Lake City is a pleasant and nicely laid-out town, with chances for fine dining and a night out in a bar, as well as good shopping during the day.

So when you plan your next holiday, give Utah a chance - you'll come back fully refreshed and fired up with a new enthusiasm for the outdoors.

Best for: Outdoor adventure and stunning scenery.

Time to go: All year you can experience white tops (for skiers) to red rocks, for summer adventurers.

Don't miss: Five national parks which are stunning for scenery and native American culture.

Need to know: As it is not a dry state, you can drink alcohol. Also, this is the home of umpteen movies, from John Wayne to Tom Cruise.

Don't forget: Your camera.

Margaret was a guest of Utah Office of Tourism and she flew to Salt Lake City via Chicago with United Airlines. United Vacations offers seven-night fly-drive visits to Utah this summer from £565, including return flights into Salt Lake City (via Chicago), free connecting flights into London from six regional UK airports, and seven days's fully-inclusive car rental (tax and car insurance included). United Vacations also offers a 12-day pre-packaged fly-drive tour of the Canyons, via Nevada, Arizona, Utah and Colorado from £1,035, incl return sched flights ex-London, into Las Vegas, all taxes and free connecting flights from six regional airports.

United Vacations reservations: 0844 499 2299 and www.unitedvacations.co.uk.



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